

## Interview with Romie L. Waterfield

October 25, 1999

Dennis Holland:

Today is October the 25th, 1999, and we have Romie L. Waterfield, retired from Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge in 197...

Romie Waterfield:

8.

Dennis Holland:

...8 and Edna M. Ford, who was secretary at Back Bay, and Ms. Ford retired in 1990, no, December...

Edna M. Ford:

'89, '89.

Dennis Holland:

December of '89. She retired just shortly after I did, and Doug Davis, who is an environmental consultant, also worked at the beach, same time that I was there, and I am Dennis Holland, conducting the interview, and we're going to be talking with, as I said, Romie Waterfield. Now, go ahead, Romie, let's see if we can pick you up pretty good.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, in the sink box...

Dennis Holland:

Well, wait a minute. Let me ask you this first. Let's start out with where were you born and when, and when?

Romie Waterfield:

I was born at Little Washwood in 1918.

Dennis Holland:

All right, where is Washwood?

Romie Waterfield:

In Prince William County, Virginia Beach.

Dennis Holland:

Virginia Beach.

Romie Waterfield:

It is now. It used to be Prince William County, Virginia.

Dennis Holland:

Yeah, and what were your parents' names?

Romie Waterfield:

My dad was named Charles, Charles Waterfield.

Dennis Holland:

Okay.

Romie Waterfield:

My momma's name was Etta Waterfield, E-t-t-a.

Dennis Holland:

Okay, and brothers and sisters?

Romie Waterfield:

I had four sisters and four brothers.

Dennis Holland:

You said you were born in 1918?

Romie Waterfield:

1918.

Dennis Holland:

What was, what is your birth date? We may have a national...

Romie Waterfield:

July the 21st.

Dennis Holland:

We may have national holiday for that.

Romie Waterfield:

1918.

Dennis Holland:

Okay, and you were born at Washwoods, tell me about the school that you attended, I assume you attended school.

Romie Waterfield:

The school was one, one room building with seven grades and one teacher, and once you got through the seventh grade, you were out of school. That was as high as it went, and years later they put another grade in, the eighth grade. Then you went to high school.

Dennis Holland:

Okay. When did you start? How old were you when you started?

Romie Waterfield:

I started when I was five years old.

Dennis Holland:

Five years old.

Romie Waterfield:

Five years old.

Dennis Holland:

Okay. So you went until you were 12 or thereabouts.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, I was about 12, I guess. I stopped, well I, no, I think I was nine when I stopped to go to work with Dad, fishing in the bay, Back Bay, because he needed some help, and that's the way we made a living, either by fishing or by duck hunting or guiding.

Dennis Holland:

Okay.

Romie Waterfield:

It was a fishing village. You fished in the winter and you hunted, and then summertime, you didn't do much of anything. You made decoys and what have you, Dad did, you built houses and boats. He was a carpenter, Dad was.

Dennis Holland:

Okay.

Romie Waterfield:

And I was trying to help him, I was always in his way.

Dennis Holland:

And you learned to hunt or to shoot ducks and geese...

Romie Waterfield:

Right. I started hunting when I was about seven or eight years old, I guess. I was big enough to hold the gun up, and there was plenty of ducks. You

could go down to the creek and kill all you wanted. One of the bad things that I remember, what Dad always told me that I was a shell waster. He used to give me three shells and tell me to kill a mess of ducks for the family while he worked at clubs, and I'd go out, unless I sneaked down, I didn't get a mess of ducks for the family, because I wasn't that good a shot. But if I could get a good shot in and kill four or five the first time, then I was all right.

Dennis Holland:

Did you ever, did you ever shoot anything besides ducks?

Romie Waterfield:

I've shot geese and swans.

Dennis Holland:

What about Pied-billed Grebes?

Romie Waterfield:

I've killed Pied-billed Grebes, they're just as good as a duck if you cook it.

Dennis Holland:

Well, tell me how you cooked it, how your mamma cooked it.

Romie Waterfield:

You stewed it.

Dennis Holland:

All right.

Romie Waterfield:

And put, potatoes, I mean, turnips in it, yeah.

Dennis Holland:

Well, I believe you used to tell a story once in awhile about putting, what was that story you used to tell?

Romie Waterfield:

What, about the Grebe or about the...

Dennis Holland:

Yeah.

Romie Waterfield:

...about the Great Blue Heron and the White Heron and <unclear> and the, yes.

Dennis Holland:

Where you cooked the Grebe and put him in the pot and boiled him for three...

Romie Waterfield:

That, that was, yes, that was, no, that was a Cormorant. I asked a man one time had he ever eat a Cormorant, and he said, "Yes, he tried one one time," and he said, "I cooked him, I put him in the pot, and I boiled him for three days, and I opened the lid, and he dove under." So I never did eat one, a Cormorant, but I have eat Grebes, yes.

Dennis Holland:

Okay, all right. Now, when you were living on the beach and hunting was important as part of the livelihood.

Romie Waterfield:

Right.

Dennis Holland:

Not only for you to eat but you were always selling, you were selling your services as a guide. So tell me about some of the guiding that your daddy did and you did.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, Dad was a guide at False Cape, it was a Boston club, for 17 years, and I guided all the clubs, including False Cape after Dad quit. But I, I started out as \$1 a day guiding. Finally I got \$2, and went up to \$2.50, and towards the last of my guiding, it was \$7 a day, and if you were good, sometimes a sportsman would give you a tip, \$2 or \$5, sometimes \$20, but you had to be pretty good, and you had to be sure you knew how to get him some ducks. But them things is passed now.

Dennis Holland:

Now, did you use, I'm sure you used fixed blinds, sure blinds, and what else did you use, sink boxes?

Romie Waterfield:

Well, I used sink boxing. In 1935 I got them for the last time they were run, me and Cecil Steven. We worked for the Newport News Sink Box Club, and they had three sink boxes, and I operated one of the sink boxes.

Dennis Holland:

Okay, and tell me about the layout of the sink box itself and what it took to actually sink it.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, you laid the, you had a mast in the boat. You had about a 32 foot boat, about eight foot wide. You had a mast in there. You pulled the battery up the mast, set it overboard, and you used about 700 pounds of iron, it was iron ducks and ballast iron to sink it down level with the water, and my, mostly, that was a set up battery, and it took two men to get in there and sit down in it. You had a door on either side of the deck that you put your ballast iron in, and you put your iron decoys on deck. You tied in about 300 ducks and 12 or 15 geese.

Dennis Holland:

Now these were the floating decoys.

Romie Waterfield:

Right, they were floating, they were floating decoys.

Dennis Holland:

Right, yeah, yeah.

Romie Waterfield:

They were wooden.

Dennis Holland:

The wooden decoys, the floaters.

Romie Waterfield:

Right.

Dennis Holland:

And your iron decoys went on the wings.

Romie Waterfield:

Right, your iron decoys went on the wings, and when you got it down good like you was supposed to have it, you could get ten yards away from it, you couldn't tell what it was. It just looked like a raft of ducks, because you couldn't see the box. The only way a duck could see you was come directly over top of you and look down. If you come by the side, and I heard Dad say when he was guiding, I mean, when he was hunting for market that the Redheads were so thick that they would sometimes land on the deck, and he'd take his arm and sweep them off before he could shoot them.

Dennis Holland:

That's a lot of ducks.



Romie Waterfield:

And I've seen ducks, in my day, I've seen ducks where they blacken the sky, and I've seen ducks and geese with so much noise you couldn't understand the person talking next to you, when they'd get up and go to the ocean. They didn't have refuges.

Dennis Holland:

Yeah.

Romie Waterfield:

And they'd go to the ocean and stay all day, then at twilight or sundown, they'd come back to the bay.

Dennis Holland:

And this was, when, your last year that you guided for sink boxes was 1935, then they were illegal after that.

Romie Waterfield:

They were illegal after that.

Dennis Holland:

But you still did guiding though, of course.

Romie Waterfield:

Right.

Dennis Holland:

And so along comes the '40's, '41, so you must have got drafted.

Romie Waterfield:

I did.

Dennis Holland:

You went in the Service.

Romie Waterfield:

I went in the Service.

Dennis Holland:

Well tell me about your induction and how you got there.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, I went and I was inducted, and I didn't know anything. I'd never been to Norfolk, and I had to go to the Main Street and catch the train and go up someplace and I got, I got there just on time that morning, and I went up to Richmond or somewhere close to Richmond, that's where we were inducted at, and I went on and went in the Army, and went to Fort Monroe, stayed there for awhile. That was the best post I've ever been to, and then I come down to Camp Pendleton at Virginia Beach, and then I went back in the Service, away to Fort Georgia Meade. I stayed there for awhile and then we, then the war broke out, and we had to go, it was 404, the number was 404801, and everything was painted yellow. We went to New York, and that's where we, we went to Miles Standish and from Miles Standish we went to New York. Miles Standish was in Boston, Massachusetts, and we went overseas and went to Africa. We went to Oran, Africa, and from Africa, I was with the British 8th Army for a year. We went in Tunis and Maseru and several other places, and from there we were under the 31st Brigade, and from there we went to Italy and we, the 5th Army and stayed there for a year. We went into secure the airfields that were bombed out. We went in and put the guns up and secured the airfield, and from Italy I went to Southern France on the second invasion, and from Marseille over to Toulon, that's the only thing we got, I ever got any credit for, and I did get the Good Conduct Medal.

Dennis Holland:

After all that.

Romie Waterfield:

I'm proud of that, and the man said you didn't know what you were doing.  
That's why you got it, and so that's probably right.

Dennis Holland:

Gracious. What was your job while you were in the military?

Romie Waterfield:

Oh, boy, I had every kind of job you could think of. I was in artillery.

Dennis Holland:

Artillery.

Romie Waterfield:

That's why my ears was so bad was the bombs and the guns and what have you. But I was a power <unclear> operator, I was a DV-72 operator, and was an ammunition operator. I was anything they wanted.

Dennis Holland:

Whatever had to be done.

Romie Waterfield:

Anything had to be done. But you couldn't hear, you couldn't put things in your hear because you had to hear the commands from the Sergeants, when to fire and when not to, and so...

Dennis Holland:

So if you didn't put something in your ear, you got the blast, and if you did you got blasted in a different way.

Romie Waterfield:

That's right.

Dennis Holland:

All right, and you came back home, and when were you discharged, Romie?

Romie Waterfield:

I think it was '46.

Dennis Holland:

'46, okay.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah, I believe so. I went up to 404 prison camp after the war was over and helped to process 96,000 Germans, and I was shipped out from <unclear> in France to the ship to come home. I went home over with 2800, and I come back with three. It, so it wasn't all fun.

Dennis Holland:

No, it couldn't have been all fun, not at all.

Romie Waterfield:

But I never had to do that, I hope I'll never have to go through that again.

Dennis Holland:

I don't think you would.

Romie Waterfield:

No, at my age, I don't think so.

Dennis Holland:

I don't think so.

Romie Waterfield:

But I told a man the other day, I'm ready to go if they call me.

Dennis Holland:

After you got, after you got back home, you went back to Washwoods?

Romie Waterfield:

I went back to Washwoods, and I went fishing to start with, and then the duck hunting that season, that winter, guided.

Dennis Holland:

And your daddy was still living down there?

Romie Waterfield:

Dad was still living, yeah, and he was still guiding with <unclear> Dudley Goose Hunting and Ducking Club. But in 1936 I guided for the Goose Hunting and Ducking Club, and they had live decoys, live ducks and live geese, and that was the last year they used live ducks and live geese.

Dennis Holland:

Tell me about that. How did they, how did you set them up and...

Romie Waterfield:

You put a, you had a leather strap around the leg, and you had a thing to put the rivet in. You had a ring in there, and you had a weight, a five pound weight with a cord on it with a clip on the end of it, and you clipped that in the ring and set them overboard. Now some of the people, on geese had what they called, well they had tanks with a flap, they called them flaps, goose flaps. They stuck it in the bottom and had it just under the water, and the goose would get up there and stand up there and prune himself during the day. But if you had a pair of mated geese, you put one on one side of the blind and one on the other side of the blind so they couldn't see each other, and they would call all day. That would bring in the live geese. But if you shot a goose, one of the decoy geese, you paid \$5 on that day at <unclear> Dudley's, anyone who shot her goose or killed her goose, you paid \$5, and that was a big price in that day, because he only got \$15 a day with taking three days at a time, that's what he charged, which was a fortune, and you could go duck hunting or you could go bird hunting. They was shorebirds,

yellow-legs and plovers, and you could go either way. If you get one of the old...

Dennis Holland:

How did you rig for shooting shore birds?

Romie Waterfield:

You could shoot shore birds in that day.

Dennis Holland:

I know. How did you do it?

Romie Waterfield:

Well, you stuck out decoys, you know, wooden decoys.

Dennis Holland:

Stick ups.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah. Dad made beautiful ones and my uncle, and Lee Dudley, he made a lot of them, and Dudley had several stands of these shore bird decoys, and you brought it in flat, they used to be flat stayed there on the beach but grassed up and a little water in it, and you'd stick them birds out and get them on a sand hill, and they'd come right in to you, you know, and you'd shoot them, and if you shot at a bunch of Yellow Legs, they'd get up and leave and come right back again. You could kill the whole bunch.

Dennis Holland:

How do they taste?

Romie Waterfield:

They were delicious, yes.

Dennis Holland:

Of all the shore birds, do you have a favorite one that you...

Romie Waterfield:

No, I didn't have any favorite one, and the only thing we got wrong one time, Dad went out to kill a mess of birds, and he killed the Kingfisher.

Dennis Holland:

A Kingfisher.

Romie Waterfield:

A Kingfisher. So Momma, she always stewed the birds and make a big stew to get the gravy and the bread and flour bread and put in there, dumplings we called it, and she put that Kingfisher in there with the rest of the birds and ruined

the whole dinner. That was the fishiest thing you ever tried to eat. I still remember it. Never, Dad never killed another Kingfisher.

Dennis Holland:

So word to the wise is never put a Kingfisher in your stew.

Romie Waterfield:

Don't put a Kingfisher in your dinner.

Dennis Holland:

It messes it up, all right. Oh goodness, and so what were you doing then, after you got out, you're back to the beach at Washwoods and doing some guiding and some hunting, and you went up the beach to Damn Neck to go to work.

Romie Waterfield:

Right, I went up, there was a McCoy Elverson Contractor, I got a job down there as a carpenter. He was building form, I was a form maker, and I went in and asked the old man, it was T. W. Williams was the, was the manager of the yard, so I asked him about a job, and he said, "Well what can you do?" I said, "Nothing." He says, "Can you, if we're putting a winding stair up, would you be able to cut it?" I said, "No, sir." He said, "I see you don't have a white uniform on either." I said, "No." He said, "Well come to work tomorrow." He said, "There's a lot of these people come in here today and wanted job, they had a white uniform on, never been soiled at all." He says, "I know they were lying." He says, "But you told me the truth, you couldn't do nothing." He said, "That's the ones I want." He said, "I can teach you."

Dennis Holland:

So he did.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah.

Dennis Holland:

As a carpenter?

Romie Waterfield:

Well, I learned from Dad the carpentry, you know, as a <unclear>.

Dennis Holland:

And you were working there until...

Romie Waterfield:

I worked there about nine months, and then I went to Sandbridge where they started building the buildings at Sandbridge, and I helped to build 24 of them houses at Sandbridge.

Dennis Holland:

Okay.



Romie Waterfield:

Evans and Waters was the contractor in that day, and Arbor, not Arbor Holmes, but Holmes was the big shot, so I worked there, and then I got a chance to go to the refuge.

Dennis Holland:

That was in 1954?

Romie Waterfield:

Right, '54.

Dennis Holland:

Who was the manager then?

Romie Waterfield:

Jack Perkins was the manager, yes.

Dennis Holland:

Okay, okay. Tell me a little bit about Jack.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, Jack was a fine man. He would, he'd tell you what he wanted done, and he expected you to do it, but he never come and bothered you.

Dennis Holland:

He wouldn't get in your way.

Romie Waterfield:

No, because I rebuilt the tower. It was 68 feet up above the, when I built a tower, a house on it, and I completed it and told Jack to go up and check it, and he never went. He said, "I'll take your word you finished it."

Dennis Holland:

Now, the little bit of background that you knew about Jack Perkins was he went on the admiral bird expeditions to the Antarctic.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah.

Dennis Holland:

Two of them, the last two, I suppose.

Romie Waterfield:

That's right.

Dennis Holland:

The first one was by sailing ship, wasn't it?

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah, I think so, yeah.

Dennis Holland:

Yeah, and so were the latter ones, yeah, okay, and then he came to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Romie Waterfield:

Right. Before, Harry Bailey was the first manager there, and I don't know what happened, <unclear> was his assistant.

Dennis Holland:

Well, did you ever have an occasion to run into Harry Bailey?

Romie Waterfield:

Oh, I knew Harry Bailey well, yeah.

Dennis Holland:

Okay.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah, he was a fine man so far as I knew about him.

Dennis Holland:

He was a local person, wasn't he?

Romie Waterfield:

Right, he was <unclear>. But he, I think he drank a little and the Hopper was a cabin cruiser.

Dennis Holland:

The boat?

Romie Waterfield:

The boat, and he used to misuse that, and her, and <unclear> used to report him, and that's what got the thing started, and they finally checked on him, and he sent Jack Perkins out there, and he didn't know Jack Perkins was going to be manager but, until after he'd been there several months. But I knew Jack, too. Jack was a nice, fine fellow. I knew him well before I went to work with him.

Dennis Holland:

Yeah, and so you worked with Jack. What were you doing? You said you built the tower or rebuilt it, what was...

Romie Waterfield:

I rebuilt it.

Dennis Holland:

Rebuilt, okay.

Romie Waterfield:

The house on top of the tower.

Dennis Holland:

Okay.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah. I was a patrolman. I went on as a patrolman, 2800 a year.

Dennis Holland:

You were getting rich.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, yes, I quit a job at \$68 a week to go, to take that, at Sand, I quit the one at Sandbridge.

Dennis Holland:

You moved north. Did you live there on the refuge?

Romie Waterfield:

I lived there on the refuge, yes. Yeah, I lived in number two quarters. That had a kitchen, a living room, and two bedrooms upstairs, and the bathroom was upstairs, and I always told a story when somebody asked me something about it, I said, "Well, the only thing I've got against the number two quarters, I have to run up and look at myself in the mirror before I go to work, and I don't like it because I had to go to upstairs." So I said, "I'm going to buy me a mirror and put it on the back porch." That was one of my jokes.

Dennis Holland:

And I believe you did.

Romie Waterfield:

I enjoyed the Back Bay Refuge.

Dennis Holland:

Yeah, <unclear> Price and I kind of sat around your table quite a few times.

Romie Waterfield:

I used to tell him what the high tide and low tide was about.

Dennis Holland:

Well, tell me about that.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, see I, there was two men from the mountains, I run two cabins and run a club, run a fellows club for him, I was the manager, and he had two blinds. So these people would come down here, they had never been to the east coast, had never seen the ocean, and they come down after night at Sandbridge, and I picked them up. Well, we started down, we was in an old station wagon, I had a station wagon, and we got, it was high water and the old bumps, you know, the old camel backs, and they said, "Where in the world are we going." I said, "Well it's high tide." He says, "High tide?" I said, "Yes." I says, "Low tide is, you drive a lot easier." "Well," he said, "tell me about this high tide and this low tide." I said, "Well, you've heard of the Carl Islands, haven't you?" I'd never heard of them, but that's what I said. He said, "Oh yeah, yeah." I said, "Well they breathe." I said, "When they draw in, they suck the water in," I said, "and we got a low tide." I said, "And when they exhale, they blow the water out and we got a high tide." He said, "Well I'll buy that," and I told, they believed it so much I had to tell them I was lying, and so they wanted to know then, says, "What kind of a place are you carrying us?" I said, "This Route 60, it goes all the way down to North Carolina." Well, they hadn't heard of North Carolina, so they were confused. So we got down there. It was about 20, 30 miles, 40 miles, got down there and it had a big, a lot of oak trees there at the two cabins, and you couldn't see nothing but dark. It had a light on it, but you couldn't see nothing on account of trees. So he said "Well it looks like we're going to get a good night." I said, "Well I wouldn't be surprised or I wouldn't be worried about that." I says, "The old train comes by in the morning about 5:00," and I said, "She rattles everything around here," I said, "wake it up." They said, "A

train?" I said, "Yep." Said, "Where does it go?" I said, "I have no idea where it goes." So the next day I called them, that morning I called them at 3:00 the next morning to go duck hunting. They got up and come down to the dock, you know, and everything was still dark under them oak trees, and they stretched around there a little bit and yawned and after awhile they, you couldn't leave to sunrise, because that's the come of day, you know, and they commenced to look around, look around. One of them says to the other, says, "Liar."

Dennis Holland:

They found you out, didn't they?

Romie Waterfield:

They found me out. I had told them so many lies, and while they were there and killed a hen Redhead, and they was the happiest people you ever saw.

Dennis Holland:

They didn't mind you lying at all, did they?

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah, they forgive me.

Dennis Holland:

So after you went to work at Back Bay and lived out there, of course you lived on the beach all your life anyway...

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah.

Dennis Holland:

There was a few storms that came along there, and I know one in 1962  
<unclear>.

Romie Waterfield:

Right.

Dennis Holland:

You and Travis kind of rode that one, Travis McDaniel...

Romie Waterfield:

Right.

Dennis Holland:

...was Assistant Manager there at the time. Was that one of the worst storms you had?

Romie Waterfield:

No, one of the worst storms that I ever saw, well at the refuge, yes.

Dennis Holland:

Yes, yes.

Romie Waterfield:

But one of the worst storms I ever saw was 1933. We had two, one in August and one in September. The one in September's the one that done the damage.

Dennis Holland:

After '33, the CCC's built sand dunes.

Romie Waterfield:

Built a sand fence. The State asked for some labor, because everything was, didn't have any money.

Dennis Holland:

Yeah.

Romie Waterfield:

People didn't, so the State asked the government to furnish the money, so that's why they come up with the CCC's. I didn't join, but I did work for the State of Virginia for \$3 a week. They hired, they hired two boys, me and Danny Jewel, and that was cutting pine trees and digging the old filter ditch over here, which is the canal now, and so Dan was working, at that time, in the ocean and was catching some fish. You know, they didn't sell for much but, so Randolph Yule, Dennis Yule's father reported me to his daddy for me making too much money to work for the State, and I got fired.

Dennis Holland:

For making too much money?

Romie Waterfield:

Yes, I was making \$3 a week, I was.

Dennis Holland:

Romie, I remember you talking about some of the consequences to the wildlife after the 1933 storm.

Romie Waterfield:

Oh yeah, you couldn't kill a pair of ducks, but after that, just after the '33, about '35, '36, then they come back again, the Bay come back lush with aquatic.

Dennis Holland:

How about other wildlife?

Romie Waterfield:

Well, ducks, geese, and swan come back.

Dennis Holland:

I mean, I mean after the storm, things like amphibians and muskrats and minks and things like that.



Romie Waterfield:

Well, a lot of the muskrats drowned, but they replenished themselves pretty quick, you know. It used to, you could trap all season and catch hundreds and hundreds and thousands of muskrats, and the next year there'd be more. But they had a disease in them, and now they've never come back. We don't have a lot of muskrats anymore. But it used to, coons was \$9 a piece, the fur, the hides was, yeah.

Dennis Holland:

Woah.

Romie Waterfield:

And I've sold muskrats for \$3.50 and greater myself.

Dennis Holland:

Romie, let's get back and ask you about the Fish and Wildlife Service. What was your first job, what was the title of your first job? Was that patrolman or...

Romie Waterfield:

Patrolman, yes.

Dennis Holland:

Patrolman, okay, yeah, and Jack hired you to be a patrolman down on the refuge.

Romie Waterfield:

Patrolman, yes.

Dennis Holland:

Just what did you do?

Romie Waterfield:

I patrolled the beach and...

Dennis Holland:

Did you work the bay?

Romie Waterfield:

...patrolled the bay and counted the ducks and we kept a tally on how many ducks we had, about how many. It wasn't nothing to count 50,000 geese in the refuge and 200,000 or 300,000 ducks, Canvasback, and Widgeon, and Redheads.

Dennis Holland:

Because of all the vegetation, the aquatics.

Romie Waterfield:

It was full of vegetation. 1955 was one of the best years that we had, I mean, I can remember of recent years.

Dennis Holland:

Were the pools built there on Back Bay at that time, or did you all build them later?

Romie Waterfield:

No, <unclear> Bailey stuck out some signs for these, but me and Jack Perkins designed the, we took a road grater and made some from the sand dunes we'd make half moon circle, half moon circle, and there was no grass or vegetation grew on a salt flat. It was all salt, looked like a big <unclear> field, and what happened was, the rain water would freshen up the dirt, and grass started to grow, and as it rained and continued to rain, it freshened up more until it got growing all over, and well you remember, we had the best hunting place there was known.

Dennis Holland:

Well, when you flew over it, you could still see remnants of those half moon...

Romie Waterfield:

Half moon, yeah.

Dennis Holland:

...dikes out there.

Romie Waterfield:

Dikes, yeah.

Dennis Holland:

That you pulled up with a road grater, with a road grater.

Romie Waterfield:

With a road grater, an old fashioned road grater. I remember doing that.

Dennis Holland:

That was a towed type, wasn't it, that one you pull behind a tractor?

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah.

Dennis Holland:

Yeah.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah.

Dennis Holland:

Where did you get the tractor?

Romie Waterfield:

Got it from...

Dennis Holland:

Kentucky.

Romie Waterfield:

Golden Pond, Kentucky, yeah.

Dennis Holland:

Tell us that story about the little girl up there and your fish.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, I went there, and I've never seen a place like it. I hadn't never drove anything more than pick up, and I had that old <unclear> truck. It was about an eight, ten ton. I got in there, and I talked to the manager, and I talked to this pretty young girl, and she wanted to, awful interested in me because she wanted to know how Virginia Beach was. So I was telling her, but I was telling her about my guppies that I got from Jack Perkins, and I had about eight or nine aquariums full of guppies.

Dennis Holland:

Every time you, they'd have babies, you'd have to get a new aquarium, huh?

Romie Waterfield:

And so I left the next morning, and the man told me, he said, "Now I want you to be careful. It'll go up like this, down like this, never seen nothing like it," and I had a piece of, my truck come from Tennessee, and it wasn't too good a truck, because I put three new tires on it, I rebuilt the generator and finally had to rebuild the motor. So it took me 17 days to get home, and I was ready to quit when I got in Sandbridge. Jack Perkins met me. Finest man I ever seen. He said, "I want you to take three days off and rest." I told him, I said, "Now here's this bulldozer on this truck." He said, I said, "A man from South Carolina is going to come and get it, going to get the truck." I said, "But I

don't care what happens to the bulldozer," because I had got stopped on 17, the police had stopped me. I didn't have no turn signals and no real mirrors on it, on the truck. He asked me, he said, "Where do you think you're going." I says, "I'm going to the Back Bay Refuge." He said, "You ain't going no place, not until you get a truck and put this bulldozer on it." Well, the first mistake I made, I didn't take the blade off of the bulldozer, I had it in intact, and that was two foot on either side of the cab with no real mirrors on it. I come all the way through Georgia, through Carolina, Georgia, up into North Carolina and Virginia with that thing. So they told me, the police told me, say, "You ain't going nowhere." I said, "Well, I've been 17 days on the road," and I said, "I'd certainly like to get down to the refuge," but I said, "I can tell you this, I'll give you the whole works if you'll put down in Sandbridge." He said, "We don't want it." "Well," he says, "I'm going to let you go, but I'm going to ask you a question. When you get to the ten ton bridges, how are you going to get across them with this thing you got?" I hadn't thought about that. So I said, "Well, I don't know." "Well," he says, "go, but I wish you luck."

Dennis Holland;

That little girl that you met up there in Kentucky and told her about your guppies and so forth, you met her at a later time.

Romie Waterfield:

I met her after she had married the manager and he had won in Washington, come down for, to go to Barber's Hill for a weekend, and they got stuck, and I went down there, and this girl was asking me, this lady was asking me had I ever drove, had I ever been out anywhere from the refuge, and I said, "No." She said, "You ain't never been to Golden Pond, Kentucky?" I said, "Yeah," and she said, "Telling me lies about them guppies." I said, "Yeah," and I said, "Well this is a small world."

Dennis Holland:

And her name when you first met her was Judy Cunningham, and then when you met her again 25 years later or 30 years later, it was Judy Greenwalt.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah, that's right.

Dennis Holland:

All right, and I'll tell you now another little thing about her. Her son married my daughter.

Romie Waterfield:

Is that right?

Dennis Holland:

And we share a grandson.

Romie Waterfield:

Well how about that. Well I know she don't remember me but...

Dennis Holland:

Yes, she does. Oh yes, she still remembers you, yep, she certainly does. Well it, during the, during the time that you worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service, you had some, a lot of good times, and every once in awhile you had some bad times.

Romie Waterfield:

Right.

Dennis Holland:

There was one time one of your law enforcement got you into, got you into, well I wouldn't say a little bit of difficulties, but you came to the rescue of somebody else, Bob Pacific.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah.

Dennis Holland:

Bob was getting worked over pretty severely, wasn't he?

Romie Waterfield:

Right, we got beat up, yeah, knocked one of Bob's eyes out and knocked one of his teeth out, and they done \$85 worth of damage to me. It was like a bulldozer run over me, and every couple of boys, one of them was 18, the one got a hold of me was. So I went up there, they broke in the refuge and broke out of the refuge, and Bob went up there to, and wrote them a ticket, and that's when they had the fight. So I went back, I went up to back up Bob because I didn't know if he was having trouble or not. When I went up there, they were all fighting. They were having a time, and they were about to kill Bob, and so I had a gun. I had an old 45 long barrel.

Dennis Holland:

Yeah, revolver.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah, so I drew that thing on the boy, told him what I intended to do with it, and the first time I ever drew a gun on anybody, and he quieted down so I put the old gun back in the holster, and they bear hugged me, the boy did, and if we didn't have a time. Somebody taught me in the war that if you, that if somebody got on you and they were mad, you could get your hand up to their mouth, they had their teeth clenched, and you could get your fingers in between their teeth and their jaw and just pull the thing right on out, and that's what I done to that boy and he give up like a baby, and then I thought I had hurt him bad, so I told him to get up and get in the truck, we was going to take him and lock him up, and he said he couldn't get up. I said, "Well I can get you up." So he kind of looked around and says, "Is he going?" I says, "Boy, you get up there and get in that truck." He said, "I can't get up." I said, "I'll get you up." I picked him up and throwed him in the truck, and he weighed

over, he weighed about 180 pounds. I don't know how I done it, but I picked him up and throwed him in there, and I told him he was going back down to the refuge, and I called you I guess, yeah.

Dennis Holland:  
Bob Gilmore.

Romie Waterfield:  
Yeah, Bob Gilmore, yeah. He come down and the policeman come down and they had a big time around there. But they took him out and locked him, and if they didn't raz me <unclear>.

Dennis Holland:  
How did this little old scrawny old fellow...

Romie Waterfield:  
Yeah, but he stayed in jail overnight.

Dennis Holland:  
Romie, what do you think was the high point of your career with Fish and Wildlife Service?

Romie Waterfield:  
Well, I don't know that I had a high point really, because I enjoyed all of it, except the last several years when they put me on police duty and had traffic signs and everything on the beach, and you had dope all over the hills, and there wasn't nobody down there but me and my wife, and people would come in and ask all kind of questions. Sometimes they'd come in after <unclear> about 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, and one time, I remember they come in to borrow a spare tire for a Plymouth. Well, we didn't have a Plymouth on the refuge, so I told him we didn't have one, but he didn't believe me. He still wanted to borrow a spare tire. He had a flat tire, and such things as that, and you never know what was going to happen at the refuge, and the manager didn't live there at that time, just me and my wife, and it wasn't too...



Dennis Holland:

It wasn't any fun for anybody.

Romie Waterfield:

It weren't no fun, no. I'd go over sometimes to this college when the college had the...

Dennis Holland:

Field trips out there.

Romie Waterfield:

...the field trips out there, and they'd have a big fire in the sand dunes. You wasn't supposed to have a fire, and they'd come walk around me in a circle, not say a word, and I'd look at him, I say, "Go have a ball."

Dennis Holland:

Have a good time.

Romie Waterfield:

I'd walk straight away from, because if you can't chew it, you better not bite it.

Dennis Holland:

Yeah. But we got it done, didn't we?

Romie Waterfield:

Oh yeah, and I liked, I enjoyed the refuge, I should did. The only one that always give me trouble was Carl Everson. He <unclear>, but I saved him one time, me and another boy, went and rescued him. He'd have died if we hadn't went after him.

Dennis Holland:

What happened?

Romie Waterfield:

He went out that morning in The Hopper by himself, wouldn't let me go, and he went over to State headquarters and stayed almost all day, but he come back just before night and it was snowing and raining, I mean, snowing and blowing and cold, and when he come by the south end of Ragged Island he stopped at a blind there I was ready to take up, was taking up. He stopped there and talked to them awhile. Then he come on across, but he come on the shore and hit set nets and got his wheels tied up in the set nets, and he got overboard onto the wheel and he got too cold and he got so he couldn't talk, and me and another boy, <unclear> that was with me, we went down there and rescued him, brought him up to the refuge and got a pint of whiskey and started pouring it in him and him running around the backyard there, running from the service building there to the boathouse and back again, and finally we had him so he could talk. He was in bad shape.

Dennis Holland:

Do you remember the Coot die offs?

Romie Waterfield:

No.

Dennis Holland:

Back when we lost all those Coots?

Romie Waterfield:

Oh yeah, I remember that, I sure do.

Dennis Holland:

What didn't die we killed.

Romie Waterfield:

That's right, but I still say there was something wrong with that deal, because if it had been cholerae, the wildlife they had at the refuge there would have died, and none of them died. It couldn't have been cholerae.

Dennis Holland:

It was diagnosed as cholerae.

Romie Waterfield:

It was?

Dennis Holland:

Yeah, but our birds over there didn't get into it, thank God. That's, yeah, it was legitimate.

Romie Waterfield:

Well, we opened the Coots and took the insides out and throwed them right down on the ground and these geese and ducks ate it, and none of them died. So how would they be immune to the cholerae?

Dennis Holland:

I can't explain that.

Romie Waterfield:

I had a lot of fun there, and I used to bug Otto. I used to tell Otto, you know, about, but I thought, when he'd come over to get the boys from the refuge, I thought he was going to pull a boat up, and I got over there, and the, all the Coots had died. I said, if he didn't get some sort of upset with me, old Otto, and now he's just about gone.

Dennis Holland:

Did you have a good time with your years in the Fish and Wildlife?

Romie Waterfield:

I had a good time, yeah, sure did. I missed it when I left, yeah, and I didn't have to retire, but I decided it was best off I did.

Dennis Holland:

There are times when you just, time to leave, time to make a change.

Romie Waterfield:

It was time to leave, yeah, because things had, in my opinion, wasn't wildlife. It was wildlife, but not the type we were first talking about.

Dennis Holland:

Could you make a summary of the changes in wildlife that you've seen take place at Back Bay?

Romie Waterfield:

Yes. In 1954 when I went to Back Bay down on the north part of the refuge, the bird sanctuary, all kinds of birds bred there, mostly terns, but they had a lot of pipers, sandpipers and stuff bred there, too, and somebody asked me later why didn't we keep a tally. I said, "They was so common, there was no reason to keep a tally," and so I went to Court, I guess Gilmore, was it you and me, went to Court, and then I said, they were trying to make me so I was an expert, which I'll never say that. Anyhow, they wanted to know about these birds, and that old, fellow from the Old Dominion there, he was talking about seagulls.

Dennis Holland:

Jerry Levy.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah. I asked him what did he mean by seagulls, what was their food, their chief food, and he didn't know, but anyhow, later they asked me in Court concerning this, what did I think that happened to the birds and the ghost crab and what have you, and I said, "Well, in the 1950' there was plenty of birds and ghost crabs," I says, "and now they ain't nothing." You take your own and make your own conclusion about this, because the ghost crab is, they're little fertilizer for the beach. They take bits of meats and grasses and bury it, that fertilizes the beach, and that builds the dune up and the grass grows up

and grows up. I seen some of the roots of this grasses were 15 feet long when it goes from the water up to the top of the dune, and something happened to the dune, then it washed away. But the cars, see, would ruin dunes. If you drove across a dune, it would split it in two, just one time.

Dennis Holland:

This was in the days when there was very little traffic on the beach.

Romie Waterfield:

There was no traffic to speak of. You'd see, once in awhile, a car.

Dennis Holland:

Until the days when you'd have 1,000 cars an hour on the beach.

Romie Waterfield:

That's right. Well, they'd tell me, say, "Well on low water, it's beautiful, its like a highway." I said, "Yeah, on low water, and you've got a four ton car or truck," I said, "you're killing thousands and thousands of crustaceans in the sand that you can't see." I said, "That's what feeds the birds, that's the food chain." But I said, "If you got high water, you will make a trench." I said, "Everybody digs the trench," I said, "what's the little sand fitters, the ghost crabs going to do?" I said, "They've got to come down and replenish their lungs at least once every 12 hours." I said, "They fall in the little indentation and they can't get up." I said, "They got one, two, or three things to do, they wait for the sun to get up and kill it, a car to come by, or a gull to eat it." I said, "That's the trouble. We don't have a ghost crab on the refuge for four miles of it for the last days," and me and one of the assistants went up to Damn Neck and done research.

Dennis Holland:

You and Frank Smith.

Romie Waterfield:

Me and Frank Smith, that time we got caught at the gate taking some dirt away from the place up there. They were going to court marshal us.

Dennis Holland:

They should have. They probably should have shot both of you right there.

Romie Waterfield:

They could have, and that's what I tried to tell them they were supposed to do.

Dennis Holland:

What were you taking, Romie?

Edna Ford:

Dirt.

Dennis Holland:

Dirt?

Romie Waterfield:

We were taking dirt.

Dennis Holland:

Dirt samples.

Romie Waterfield:

And we'd take it in and sift it at the refuge and find out how many crustaceans, we'd count them, you know, and then we'd take the same amount from the refuge, and we would find none, practically, in the refuge, but up there there was thousands of them where there wasn't no traffic. We were comparing the two places.

Dennis Holland:

Well, Romie, when you retired, your title was what, biological technician?

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah, GS-6.

Dennis Holland:

GS-6.

Romie Waterfield:

Yeah, Step 6. Somebody told me, they says when I first made that, he said, "Well how do you spell it?" I said, "Spell it, I can't even say it."

Dennis Holland:

You were a treasure to that refuge and to the Fish and Wildlife Service, and if, I'll give you a little second to think about this one. Do you have any advice to give anybody else, including me?

Romie Waterfield:

Not really, but if I had any advice to give, no, I don't have any advice to give.

Dennis Holland:

Just have a good time and enjoy what you're doing.

Romie Waterfield:

Right. I think, I think most of the refuges should be for wildlife and not for people.

Dennis Holland:

Well, you got to have people involved now.

Romie Waterfield:

You've got to have people involved, but you ain't got to have that many.

Dennis Holland:

That's what we were trying to do is bring it under control.

Romie Waterfield:

That's what happened when the man went into the Back Bay Refuge and they come back all happy as he could be and laughing, and I wondered why he was so happy. He killed a moccasin. So I asked him, I said, "What did you do?" Killed a mocassin, he said, "I killed a mocassin." I said, "You killed a mocassin out on the refuge?" "Yeah." I said, "Well what was the mocassin doing?" He said, "He tried to attack me." I said, "He did?" I said, "Well what did you do before he tried to attack you?" He said, "Well I was messing with him." I said, "That's what I thought." I said, "Now I'm going to tell you something, people like you we don't need at the refuge, because," I said, "that mocassin had just as much right as you had on the refuge, because that was his home, you invaded his home." I tell everybody, they say, "We're afraid of snakes." I say, "A snake's not going to hurt you if you don't bother them." Very few snakes will hurt you. Like I would say this, that if you see a mocassin out in the marsh, leave him alone, don't kill him, because that's foolish to kill him. If you kill all of the moccasins out there, their food chain would grow up so much there'd be a famine in nature, and that's what we don't want. There's a lot of people don't believe that. Now I know Doug does.

Doug Davis:

Does what?

Romie Waterfield:

Believes in not killing snakes.

Doug Davis:

Absolutely.

Dennis Holland:

If he can't eat it, he won't kill it. Romie, thank you very much, and we'll be talking to you some more.